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ABSTRACT

Problems relating to cooperative efforts between universities and government are considered, and an approach used in the Kellogg Public Service Research Program at the University of California, Davis, is described. This program facilitates collaborative research on policy issues and also information dissemination between the university and public agencies. Constraints on university-government collaboration include logistical problems, including the inability of staff to effectively align schedules, methods, and personal needs. Difficulties associated with cooperative efforts can result from organizational structures of colleges and agencies and barriers such as rapid turnover in government, timely responses to immediate needs, and funding questions. The Kellogg Public Service Research Program model involves: identification of an important issue or policy question; development of a work plan and time frame; and review of the project to assure that it meets scholarly standards and demonstrates the expected degree of collaborative contributions. The collaborative research projects are conducted by faculty and agency staff, with students serving as assistants to the faculty or as the primary link between the university and agency. Conferences, workshops, and symposia are appropriate vehicles for information dissemination and for exploring various sides of an issue, producing an action strategy, or teaching a skill. Additionally, commissioned papers make the issues known to the public as well as contribute to the institutions. The question of whether public policy research is a threat to academic autonomy and the appropriate directions for research are considered. (SW)

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Public Service Research at University of California, Davis

Noreen G. Dowling and Diana Stumbo

In an era of rapid technological development, an unstable economy, and major changes in social organization and values, policymakers are expected to come to grips with enormously complex questions. Extensive information is necessary to delineate and predict the consequences of possible courses of action and to choose rationally among them. The university represents a reservoir of expertise and technical capabilities that could provide much of the needed information. Many universities, particularly those chartered as land-grant institutions, are expressly mandated to perform applied research and public service. However, the relationship between the university and the various institutions that comprise the public sector has a difficult history. I will report on the problems inherent in efforts at university-government cooperation and elaborate on the approach developed and used in the Kellogg Public Service Research Program at UC Davis, that facilitates collaborative research on policy issues and information dissemination between the university and public agencies. I will consider some of the fundamental assumptions that underlie efforts to increase the extent of University public service involvement.

Public Service Research at the University of California

With the creation of the land-grant colleges, American higher education took on a mission of public service for the first time. In the words of the Morrill Act, these institutions were established to "promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial

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classes...", with an initial emphasis on instruction in agriculture, engineering and military science. The Hatch Act of 1887 established agricultural experiment stations in conjunction with land-grant colleges, and the 1914 Smith-Lever Act provided funds for extension services to disseminate research results. Cooperative Extension has been the traditional agent for service in rural areas; this has implied primarily technical outreach and recently adult education in some States. Research at the agricultural experiment station has almost exclusively been production oriented, with minimal attention to issues of social or economic policy.

The University has had contractual relations with the federal government for many years. Defense contracts, health related, basic and applied research has been federally funded, especially in the sciences since the 1940s. The student protests of the mid-sixties slowed down the flow of funds from Washington to the campuses. During this time little effort was made to involve universities with State governments and their policy developments. Cooperative Extension itself functioned as a technical resource to agricultural interests rather than a resource for State policy planning.

In California the legislature initiated a research office in 1964 to assist elected officials in gathering available information for planning and analysis of bills.

Institutional Constraints on University-Government Collaboration

Paul Sabatier, in a 1978 report to the Kellogg Public Service Research Program at UC Davis,[1] presented the rather surprising results

of his interviews with faculty members and members of both houses of the California legislature, conducted in an effort to determine the manner in which the legislature acquires technical information and the attitudes and beliefs that shape the university's role in that process. Detailed analysis of the sources of information used by committee staff and the personal staff of members on a variety of bills revealed that faculty members provided information in some way, either through written reports, testimony at hearings, or informal personal contacts, on 21% of the bills. However, when legislators and staff members ranked potential sources of information by importance, faculty members were 13th on the list, ranked well below interest groups and consulting firms and even below the mass media. Reasons given for dissatisfaction with faculty members as information sources are revealing:

> While faculty generally rated quite high among alternative sources of expertise in their substantive competence and objectivity, they rated rather low on the two most important criteria, namely, accessibility and timeliness and the ability to provide concise, relevant information. A number of members and staff indicated they were also disturbed by indifference to the social implications of their research on the part of some faculty, faculty ignorance of the political process, and the imperfect fit between faculty research and legislative needs.

Faculty members also expressed some serious misgivings about working with the legislature, naming most often the doubt that their

time and resources would be efficiently used or that their advice would be dealt with in a professional manner, e.g., with due regard for its limitations and without taking statements out of context. They also tended to doubt that their advice would have any real influence on policy decisions.

These reservations are clearly genuine, and reflect real difficulties in the collaboration process. Many of them refer to logistical problems -- the inability to effectively align schedules, methods, and personal needs. These are basically problems of linkage and demonstrate the importance of finding the optimal organizational structure to facilitate cooperative efforts by the university and public agencies. Ironically, the need for connecting mechanisms has been repeatedly voiced. Both at the 1947 All-University Faculty Conference on the Relation of the University to the State, and twenty-seven years later, at the 1974 conference on Applied and Public Service Research, participants recommended "experimenting with methods for promoting communication between university members...and appropriate outside groups" and "developing procedures that effectively match external service requests with potentially useful research and knowledge of faculty members".[2]

Constraints Within the University

The organizational structure of the university itself presents several barriers to effective public service work. In recent studies, the primary reason cited by faculty for their reluctance to become involved in public service research is the failure of the university reward structure to provide incentives.[3] In fact, faculty members

may actually be penalized for failing to follow traditional academic pathways. Promotions and other academic rewards are usually based on publications and other markers of academic success, with little or no regard for ongoing public service work. Except within professional schools, which emphasize technical skills and knowledge, applied research has traditionally been regarded as less rigorous than and therefore academically inferior to basic research. The difficulty of assessing the arduous process of establishing contacts, developing trust, determining priorities, reaching a consensus on methods, etc. that often accompanies collaborative public service work is due in part to the lack of established standards of effectiveness, and in part to the lag time between such groundwork and the realization of its intended results. However problematic the review of such work may be, the university's failure to incorporate it into the structure of incentives partially accounts for the lack of enthusiasm among faculty for public service.

Another structural characteristic that hinders effective policy research is the organization of the university into disciplines, and the resultant over-specialization and isolation of researchers. The study of complex policy issues requires a synthetic approach that cuts across traditional disciplinary limits.

Ironically, it is possible that the problem of over-specialization and disciplinary isolation extends to university institutes of government and public service, even when these units are created specifically for the study of and participation in the policymaking process. At

least one recent analysis suggests that such institutes may reflect a tendency to create new structures rather than disturb vested interests."[4]

Constraints Within Government Agencies

A number of institutional constraints similar to those inherent in the traditional organizational structure of the university deter legislators and government agency heads from recognizing the need for and implementing systematic university-based policy research. First, the transient nature of political administrations, and the structural shifts and reorganizations that accompany changes in key administrative posts, prevent the establishment of solid connections with university personnel, and discourage government employees from initiating long-term projects that don't provide immediate tangible results. Recent public impatience with government programs and the a vent of accountability, meaning the ability to balance expenditures against short-term quantifiable results, as a factor in the longevity of any program, have contributed to the sense of rapid turnover.

A further deterrent to collaboration with university personnel is the role of special interest groups in the information-gathering strategies of legislators and their staff members. Lobbyists and other representatives of special interest groups, and consultants hired by them, are the most common source of information for California legislators outside the legislative itself.[5] Even for legislators who recognize the bias in information from special interest groups, the relative difficulty of working with faculty members whose time is not so readily

at the legislators' disposal may outweigh their presumed objectivity.

Problems With University-Government Communication

In addition to the structural barriers within the university and government agencies discussed above, there are a number of problems that must be located within the collaborative process itself. Perhaps the most noticeable of these could be called time-frame conflicts. This barrier operates on two levels. Most superficially, there are fiscal calendars and funding cycles that may actually conflict, causing clerical headaches and, if not carefully monitored, leading to wasted time and money. More fundamentally, it is apparent that government agencies and legislators work in a much more short term frame of reference than do faculty and other university personnel. Agencies and the legislature tend to need solutions to pressing, short-term problems. As discussed above, this is attributable in part to rapid turnover in government. This crisis orientation conflicts with the tendency of universities to deal with long-term wide ranging research. The inability of universities to respond quickly to immediate needs may be related in a parallel manner to the position of tenured faculty members, which allows them to specialize and pursue one problem in great detail. The importance of responding in a timely manner must be reconciled with the necessity of careful and thorough consideration of the consequences of any action.

The influence of the media, and particularly of television journalism, may affect the relationship between the university and the state in other ways as well. Government personnel, and elected

officials in particular, are of necessity sensitive to the power of the media, and depend on media exposure for public support. The results of policy research are of interest to the media, particularly if they seem to point out governmental failures or to suggest new courses of action. Faculty members are not usually eager for their work to have media coverage and are cautious that their results not be summarized in the two sentences allotted on the nightly news, or in two paragraphs on page three.

Even given perfect agreement on the content and methods of a proposed collaborative public service project, two critical logistical barriers remain. First, the ubiquitous question of funding -- who would pay, and who would be paid -- is particularly acute when both actors are facing reduced resources. Present cutbacks in government spending and related reductions in available research funds at the university may discourage the initiation of experimental programs. Either or both parties may also tend to enter into cooperative relationships with "hidden agendas" -- with the desire to divert the projects to their personal ends -- when funding is tight and individual interests are threatened.

Finally, even the most enthusiastic advocates of collaborative research find it difficult to connect with others with similar needs and interests. As the university as an institution and the body of knowledge it represents become more complex, and as state and local agencies and legislative staffs decline, the problem of matching information and resources with those who need them become critical.

The scarcity of institutionalized channels for collaboration and cooperation leaves would-be participants facing a seemingly impenetrable bureaucratic maze. The model developed at the Kellogg Public Service Research Program which provides an interface between government agencies and the resources of the university community, will be discussed below.

Collaborative Research

The basis of the Kellogg Public Service Research Program is the conviction that one of the most effective ways to link the resources of the university community with the public sector is through collaborative research. Collaboration in its working definition could consist of any degree of shared responsibility, from a project proposed and supported with clerical services by a government agency but conducted by a faculty member working alone, to a stiuation where agency personnel work closely with faculty through every phase of the project. As with any working situation that attempts to meet the needs of several individuals or organizations simultaneously, collaborative research requires good will and cooperation on the part of the participants. It is not the most effective response to every request for university resources, nor can every individual work comfortably in this format. Given these obvious limitations, it has been our experience that the Kellogg model works well in a wide variety of situations. Collaborative research is an effective form of public service and one profitable to both university and government alike for many reasons, among them the following:

1. Applicability. Government agencies are not likely to participate in research efforts that do not have an immediate bearing on policy problems at hand. A shared sense of ownership in a project increases the likelihood that faculty time and effort will be used efficiently and will have a real effect.

2. Balance. Collaborators bring a unique perspective as well as a specific expertise to the shared enterprise. Ideally, faculty members will provide a comprehensive, scholarly background, and agency personnel will have practical knowledge of the situation at hand and a sense of the feasibility of various options, so that the project avoids both the isolated ivory tower speculation sometimes attributed to academics, and short-sighted, ill considered action, of which politicians are sometimes accused.

3. Linkages. As institutional channels for collaboration are established, and as individuals with similar interests meet and expand their personal networks of contacts, related research will be better coordinated, resulting in less duplication of effort and a richer understanding of the issues under study. Also, collaboration with the staff of public agencies, who are generally more stable than legislators, agency heads or other political appointees, provides a buffer for faculty against the sometimes frustrating process of political give-and-take.

4. Fiscal responsibility. It is in the interest of prudent government spending to invest public funds in policy research that will aid in the formulation of effective and cost-efficient policy and programs. Collaborative research that meets scholarly standards and uses university resources effectively for the public good is an especially sound

investment.

Benefits to the university. Collaboration with public agencies may result in increased respect and support from governmental personnel for university activities. Additionally, as public service work gains credibility, the academic community as a whole benefits from more flexibility in the range of acceptable scholarly activities and the softening of rigid disciplinary boundaries.

The Kellogg Public Service Research Program

In 1976 the University of California at Davis formally initiated a new public service research program with the support of a $1.2 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The specific goal of the program was to develop models or procedures which would facilitate research and information dissemination projects on public policy issues, carried out collaboratively by faculty members and staff of state and local government agencies. In the nearly five years since the program's inception, the process of organizing collaborative research has coalesced into a stable model, which is flexible enough to apply to various issues and working situations, yet structured enough to ensure the achievement of specific objectives. The model is illustrated in Figure 1.

The process begins with the identification of an important issue or policy question. A particular issue may be raised by any of the principal actors in the model (the university, an agency, or a community group), or Public Service Research staff may work together with faculty and agency staff to discuss problems at hand to narrow the focus to a specific research topic. A work plan and time line are

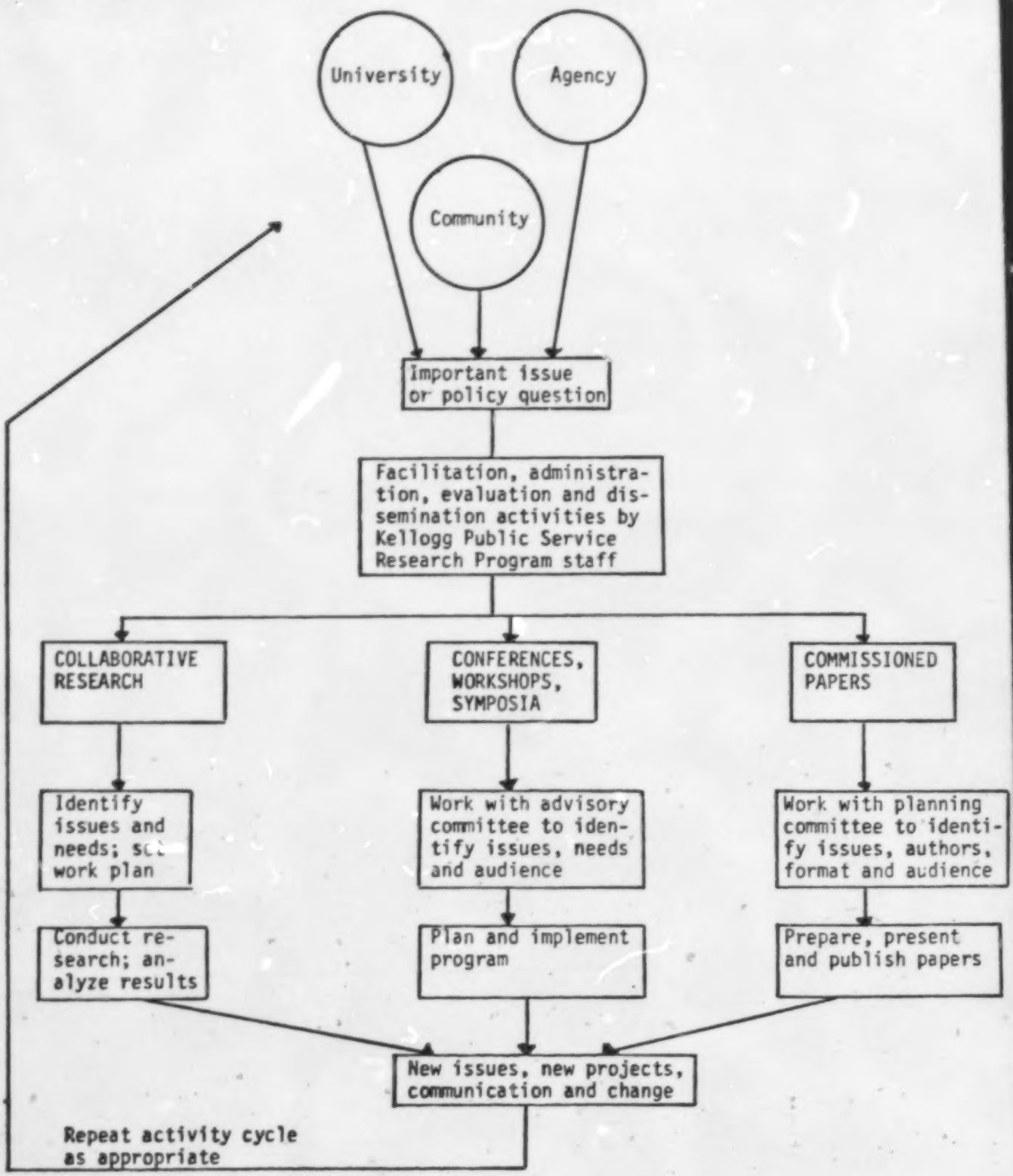
University
Agency
Community
Important issue or policy question
Facilitation, administration, evaluation and dissemination activities by Kellogg Public Service Research Program staff
COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH
CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS, SYMPOSIA
COMMISSIONED PAPERS
Identify issues and needs; set work plan
Work with advisory committee to identify issues, needs and audience
Work with planning committee to identify issues, authors, format and audience
Conduct research; analyze results
Plan and implement program
Prepare, present and publish papers
New issues, new projects, communication and change
Repeat activity cycle as appropriate

Figure 1: Flow chart for the Kellogg Public Service Research Program activity proces

then agreed upon, and the project is reviewed by the program Work Group, to assure that it meets scholarly standards and demonstrates the expected degree of collaborative contributions. The particular course of action decided upon for each project is dependent on the nature of the problem and the needs of the participating agents. These actions generally fall into one of three categories:

1) Collaborative research projects are carried out jointly by faculty and agency staff, with students acting in important capacities either as assistants to the faculty or as the primary link between the university and the agency. Research projects are devised to meet both the practical or informational needs of the agency and the academic needs of the faculty and student participants. Both partners are expected to make either direct or "in kind" contributions to support the project. Faculty contribute time, methodology and analysis while agencies contribute staff time, data and research setting. Research results may be disseminated as publications in scholarly journals, or may be published by the agency or the university. Results are also disseminated through the University Extension and Cooperative Extension networks, in courses or consultation. New issues and areas of research may be opened up and proposed as separate projects, re-initiating the research cycle. Or the research results may feed into the second major public service action category, by serving as the basis for a conference or workshop.

2) Conferences, workshops and symposia are appropriate vehicles both for information dissemination and for exploring various sides of an issue, producing an action strategy, or teaching a skill. Included

in this category are informal briefing sessions held with faculty and legislative staff members designed to identify major policy areas that can benefit from University research and to share recent research results with policymakers. Conference results are usually published as proceedings, and again, new issues that emerge may recycle back into the model process as subjects for collaborative research, or as topics for commissioned papers, the third action category.

3) Commissioned papers are designed to draw together state-of-the-art research and thinking that often are not available in a readily accessible form. Scholars from various campuses of the university and agencies are asked to prepare papers, which are collected, reviewed and edited and made available to the public. They may also form the basis of a conference or symposium.

Projects carried out under Public Service Research Program sponsorship to date have addressed such issues as rural and community development, human service planning, consumer affairs, energy, water, agricultural labor, and municipal finance. While the model process is designed to accommodate new projects that may "spin off" from work in progress, follow-up activity may also be supported by other University or agency resources.

One of the most important results of Public Service Research projects is an expanded network of informal relationships that has developed among faculty members, agency and legislative staffs, and citizens. Personal contacts and positive experiences with collaborative efforts are certainly important factors in the development of ongoing communication and cooperation. An independent evaluation of the Public Service

Research Program demonstrated that both faculty and agency participants indicated that the likelihood of future contact was markedly increased, and expressed a high level of satisfaction with their work on collaborative projects.[6]

Further Considerations

While the problems of linkages and logistics discussed above present the most immediate obstacles to increased public service involvement by the university, there are more substantive questions that must be confronted and come to terms with if the process of developing a long-term collaborative relationship between the university and the public sector is to be successful. These include questions of the validity and appropriate scope of public service work, as well as the thorny problem of ethics and values in relation to the generation of knowledge. We do not intend here to defend a position, but rather to raise some questions and delineate some aspects of these important issues that require further consideration.

The most basic question in any discussion of public service and the university is simply whether or not this is a valid activity for the academic community to undertake. Proponents of university public service would do well to consider the assumptions that underlie their position. These may include the notion that the university, as a publicly supported institution, owes the public its services in some capacity; the assumption that faculty members and other university personnel can make significant input into the solution of public policy problems; and the belief that public service work is a useful way for academics to contribute to the public good. These assumptions

have been called into question, most notably by Feller, who applies the economic concept of comparative advantages:

> ...from the viewpoint of society at large and from that of the individual institutions, it is desirable for each institution to focus on those activities in which it is relatively most efficient (or relatively least inefficient). As "knowledge" institutions, the relative strength of universities lies in their teaching and research functions. As they seek to expand these activities to reach new audiences, they begin to enter into competition with other institutions which are more specifically designed to meet the needs of these groups.[7]

Thus if legislative requests for information can be most efficiently met by consulting firms or other sources, the university should apply its resources elsewhere. The unrestricted generation and transmission of information, including teaching and research on topics that have no apparent immediate relation to questions of policy or to the daily lives of the general public, may be the university's unique contribution to the common good, when that good is defined broadly enough to include more than the alleviation of the problems of the moment.

However, the notion of "the unrestricted generation of information" is in itself problematic. Critics of increasing university involvement in public service and policy research imply that such involvement compromises academic objectivity and limits the freedom to choose research directions. This position is based on a fundamental conceptual premise:

that the free play of ideas in the academic arena will result in research and scholarship that represents every conceivable interest or position.

Seen in this light, public policy research cannot be construed as a threat to academic autonomy. When policy research is undertaken jointly by the university and public agencies, the process of determining research focus is responsive to public input and is thus fundamentally different from research conducted under contract to private corporations or interest groups. The difficult question here is, to what extent is the university responsible for encouraging a balanced representation of competing interests in the overall research agenda? If the common good depends on "the free search for truth and its free exposition",[8] is the university morally obligated to ensure that private economic considerations do not bias the generation of knowledge by limiting the scope of funded research?

Complex questions of the validity and appropriate nature and scope of university public service involvement will continue to face its proponents and opponents alike. The process of considering these questions is in itself a valuable activity for the academic community. We would like to offer a final reminder of the traditional position of scholars as critical observers of social and political trends, and to suggest that only by extending the same critical scrutiny to its own role and its own products will the university remain a center of vital debate.

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